

Political.

MR. VAN BUREN'S LETTER.

WASHINGTON, March 6, 1836.

GENTLEMEN:—I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter apprising me of the deep anxiety which is felt by a portion of your fellow citizens, as to my views upon a topic vitally affecting their immediate welfare and happiness, and of the importance of their being possessed of a thorough knowledge of them, and asking me to say, whether I do or do not believe that Congress has the constitutional power to interfere with, or abolish slavery in the Dist. of Columbia.

I am not only willing, but desirous, gentlemen, that you should have the most thorough knowledge of my views and feelings upon the delicate and interesting subject which your question is connected; and I shall endeavor to acquaint you with them in the fullest manner in my power.

Not having, heretofore, had the honor of being in political communication with you, I am not advised whether the sentiments relating to it, which have been avowed by myself and by my authority, within the last two years, have come to your knowledge. I deem it, therefore, proper, to furnish you with the substance of them, before I reply to your more specific inquiry. The avowals to which I refer, were—

1st. An opinion that Congress has no right to interfere in any manner, or to any extent, with the subject of slavery in the States;

2d. Against the propriety of their doing so in the District of Columbia; and

3d. The statement of my full concurrence in the sentiments expressed by the citizens of Albany, in public meeting, the most important of which are as follows, viz: "That the constitution of the United States carries with it an adjustment of all questions involved in the deliberations which led to its adoption, and that the compromise of interests in which it was founded, is binding in honor and good faith, independently of the force of agreement, on all who live under its protection and participate in the benefits of which it is the source;" "That the relation of master and slave is a matter exclusively belonging to the people of each State, within its own boundary, and that any attempt by the government or people of any other State, or by the General Government, to interfere with or disturb it, would violate the spirit of the federal compact;" "That we can only hope to maintain the Union of the States by abstaining from all interference with the laws, domestic policy and peculiar interests of every other State;" "That all such interference which tends to alienate one portion of our countrymen from the rest, deserves to be frowned upon with indignation by all who cherish the principles of our revolutionary fathers, and who desire to preserve the constitution by the exercise of that spirit of amity which animated its framers;" "That they deprecated the conduct of those who are attempting to coerce their brethren in other States into the abolition of slavery, by appeals to the fears of the master and to the passions of the slave; and that they could not but consider them as disturbers of the public peace, and would, by all constitutional means, exert their influence to arrest the progress of such measures;" "That whilst they would maintain inviolate the liberty of speech and the freedom of the press, they considered discussions, which, from their nature, tend to inflame the public mind and put in jeopardy the lives and property of their fellow citizens, at war with every rule of moral duty, and every suggestion of humanity, and would be constrained, moreover, to regard those, who, with a full knowledge of their pernicious tendency, persist in carrying them on, as disloyal to the Union;" "That the people of the south would do great injustice if they allow themselves to believe, that the few who are interfering with the question of slavery, are acting in accordance with the sentiments of the north upon the subject;" and finally, "that they made these declarations to their southern brethren in the same spirit of amity which bound together their fathers and ours, during the long and eventful struggle for independence; and that they did, in full remembrance of that common association, plight to their faith to maintain in practice, as far as lies in their power what they had thus solemnly declared."

These views, thus expressed and sanctioned by myself, appear to me to cover the whole ground, save the abstract question to which you have been pleased to call my attention, and I cheerfully embrace the opportunity you have felt it your duty to afford me, to explain myself fully on that also. As anxious as you can possibly be, to arrest all agitation upon this disturbing subject, I have considered the question you have propounded to me, with a sincere desire to arrive at the conclusion, that the subject, in respect to the District of Columbia, can be safely placed on the same ground on which it stands in regard to the States, viz: the want of constitutional power in Congress to interfere in the matter. I own it, however, to candor, to say to you, that I have not been able to satisfy myself that the grant to Congress, in the constitution, of the power of "exclusive legislation in all cases whatsoever" over the Federal District, does not confer on that body the same authority over the subject that would otherwise have been possessed by the States of Maryland and Virginia; or that Congress might not, in virtue thereof, take such steps upon

the subject in this District, as those States might themselves take within their own limits, and consistently with their rights of sovereignty.

This viewing the matter, I would not, from the lights now before me, feel myself safe in pronouncing that Congress does not possess the power of interfering with or abolishing slavery in the District of Columbia. But, whilst such are my present impressions upon the abstract question of the legal power of Congress—impressions which I shall at all times be not only ready, but disposed, to surrender upon conviction of error—I do not hesitate to give it to you as my deliberate and well-considered opinion, that there are objections to the exercise of this power, against the wishes of the slaveholding States, as imperative in their nature and obligations, in regulating the conduct of public men, as the most palpable want of constitutional power would be.

You have alluded in your letter to the conspicuous situation in which I have been placed before the public, and I take it for granted, that it is to that circumstance, rather than to any other, that I am to ascribe the solicitude felt by yourselves and your fellow-citizens in respect to my views on the subject. I recognize, to the fullest extent, the propriety of this desire on your part; and although there is nothing in your letter making the avowal necessary, I prefer that not only you, but all the people of the United States shall now understand, that if the desire of that portion of them which is favorable to my elevation to the Chief Magistracy, should be gratified, I must go into the presidential Chair the inflexible and uncompromising opponent of any attempt on the part of Congress to abolish slavery in District of Columbia, against the wishes of the slaveholding States, and also with the determination equally decided, to resist the slightest interference with the subject in the States where it exists. In saying this, I tender neither to them nor to you, any pledges, but declare only settled opinions and convictions of duty. Those who doubt that they will be carried into full and fair effect, are under no obligations to trust me. An opportunity is afforded them to exercise their free choice in the matter, and they may be assured, that there is no one less likely to complain of its exercise than myself.

The peculiar importance of the subject and a desire (which you will allow me to feel) that my views of it should be correctly understood, make it proper that I should explain the grounds of the opinions above expressed. They are founded, amongst others, on the following considerations, viz:

1st. I believe, that if it had been foreseen, at the time of the adoption of the constitution, that the seat of the Federal Government would be fixed in a slaveholding region, and that the subject of slavery would be there agitated to the prejudice of those holding this species of property, the right to do so, would, with the assent of the non-slaveholding States, have made an exception to the unrestricted legislative power given to Congress over the District to be ceded.

2dly. I cannot but regard the agitation of this subject in the District of Columbia, as a surprise upon the people of Maryland and Virginia, being very confident that if the state of things which now exists, had been at all apprehended by those States, the cession of the District would not have been made except upon the express condition that Congress should exercise no such power; and that with such a condition the cession would, in the then state of public opinion, have been readily accepted.

3dly. I do therefore believe, that the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, against the wishes of the slaveholding States (assuming that Congress has the power to effect it) would violate the spirit of that compromise of interests which lies at the basis of our social compact; and I am thoroughly convinced, that it could not be so done, without imminent peril, if not certain destruction, to the Union of the States. Viewing the matter in this light, it is my clear and settled opinion, that the Federal Government ought to abstain from doing so, and that it is the sacred duty of those whom the people of the United States entrust with the control of its action, so to use the constitutional power with which they are invested, as to prevent it.

I think it due to the occasion, and only a similar act of justice to my fellow-citizens of the north, of all political parties, to aid the expression of my full belief, that the opinions above expressed accord in substance with those entertained by a larger majority of the people of the non-slaveholding States, than has ever before existed in those States on a public question of equal magnitude. It is also due to them to say, that their sentiments on this subject spring out of considerations of too high a character, and look to consequences of too solemn an import, to be shaken by slight causes. With only a generous confidence on the part of the South in their brethren of the North, and a firm determination on the part of each, to visit with their severest displeasure any attempt to connect the subject with party politics, those sentiments cannot be overthrown. All future attempts on the part of the abolitionists to do so, will then serve to accumulate and concentrate public odium on themselves. That there are persons at the North who are far from concurring in the prevailing sentiment I have described, is certainly true; but their numbers, when compared with the rest of the community, are very inconsiderable; and if the condition of things be not greatly aggravated by impudence, many of them, I have no

doubt, will ultimately adopt sounder views of the subject; and the efforts of those who may persist in the work of agitation, may be overcome by reason, or rendered inoperative by constitutional remedies.

To one class of those who have hitherto petitioned Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, I cannot forbear to refer. I allude to the society of Friends, or the people denominated Quakers. The uniformity of their course upon this subject, the temperate manner in which it has been manifested, and the marked excellence of their conduct and character, appear to have conciliated respect for their motives, even from those who differ with them in opinion. As far as my observation has enabled me to judge, it is due to them to say, that as there has been an indication of any change of opinion upon their part during the present excitement, so has there been no evidence of a disposition to lead themselves to the undue agitations of the public mind, attempted by others. There is certainly no class of people in this country, who have a deeper interest in the preservation of the Union and of the happy system of government which it upholds, than they; and it has now become very apparent to all reflecting and observing minds, that the question of slavery in the District of Columbia cannot be pressed to the result they desire, with safety to those paramount objects. Do not these considerations justify the hope, that from them, at least, we may reasonably expect, for the future, a mode of dealing with the subject which, whilst it does no injustice to their principles, shall repress, instead of increasing agitation, and not endanger the great interests to which I have referred? To doubt it would be to distrust the influence which industry, morality, intelligence and republican habits—qualities which all admit them to possess in a high degree, are calculated, in great emergencies, to exert upon the conduct of their possessors. And for the like reason, it may certainly be expected that well-disposed persons of other religious denominations, who, without a full consideration of the difficulties which surround this subject and of the dangerous consequences to which the efforts of the abolitionists so evidently tend have lent to these efforts the influence of their names and character, will be careful hereafter to avoid the repetition of an error so unfortunate and mischievous.

In every view of the subject, therefore, it does appear to me, that although there certainly is, in the present condition of the country in relation to it, sufficient to excite the most serious attention, there is nothing in the state of public opinion in the United States to justify that panic in the public mind, which invariably disqualifies those who partake of it, from dealing wisely or successfully with the circumstances by which it is produced. From abroad we have, I think, some right to expect less interference than heretofore. We shall, I am confident, for some time at least, have no more foreign agents to enlighten us on the subject. Recent results here, and the discussion with which they have been attended, cannot fail to attract the attention of the reading and reflecting portion of the foreign public. By these means they will be made to understand our real condition in this respect, and they will know that the unchangeable law of that condition is, that the slave question must be left to the control of the slaveholding States themselves, without molestation or interference from any quarter, that foreign interference of every description can only be injurious to the slave, without benefit to any interest, and will not be endured by any section of our country; and that any interference, coming from even the non-slaveholding portions of our own territory, is calculated to endanger the perpetuity, and if sanctioned by the General Government, would inevitably occasion the dissolution of our happy Union. Seeing the subject in this, its true aspect, and conscious as they must be, that the downfall of this republic would be the severest blow that the cause of liberty and self-government could receive, and from which its recovery would be hopeless, the wise and the good amongst them—those who are really guided by the principles of justice & humanity—will pause and acknowledge that they have misapprehended the true bearings of this question. Instead of accusing our countrymen, who hold property in slaves, with disregarding the general principles of liberty and the dictates of a pure religion, they will recognize, in this class of our citizens, as sincere friends to the happiness of mankind as any others, and will become sensible that this species of property, the result of covetousness which they had no control, is an inheritance which they only know how to dispose of. Instead of charging the people of the non-slaveholding States and as has often been done, with hypocrisy in professing an ardent love of freedom, they will find that the free citizens of the North are only acting upon the principles of fidelity, to their most solemn engagements; that if they were to attempt the accomplishment of what is desired of them by those who regard slavery as inconsistent with the equal rights on which our institutions are founded, they will involve themselves in the odium, either of seeking to evade a compact which was the means and the pledge of our national existence, or of availing themselves of their present power and unexampled prosperity, to dissolve a connexion with their southern brethren, formed at a period of mutual adversity, for a cause which was then not only known to exist but the continuance of which was expressly recognized in the bond of their union.

I have thus gentlemen, been compelled to

extend my remarks, considerably further than I intended, when I commenced to answer your inquiry: As, however, the subject was delicate and important, I feel that I have not trespassed farther upon your time in its examination than was proper to enable you to comprehend the views I entertained of it, or than was respectful to the considerations which justified your call for those views. And I feel assured, whatever may be the difference of opinion, if any, which exists between myself and any other portions of my fellow citizens, that the issue of this matter as of all preceding questions which have agitated the public mind, and have been thought to be pregnant with danger, will, in their hands, be such as to strengthen the bonds of their union, and to increase those fraternal and patriotic affections, which our past national history has so often and so honorably illustrated.

I am, very respectfully,
Your obedient servant,
M. VAN BUREN.

Messrs: Junius Amis, Isaac Hall, John Wall, C. Yellowby, Samuel B. Spirit, and James W. Paizinn. Jackson, N. C.

THE LETTER.

The P. Intelligencer draws largely on the gullibility of the people, when it has the audacity to say, that "Mr. Van Buren has, on every important question, proved himself the enemy of Southern Rights." Was he so, when he was the uncompromising opponent of the United States Bank? when he is the enemy of National Internal Improvements? when he went for the reduction of the Tariff? when he supported Crawford against Adams? when he denounces the Abolitionists, and pronounces his anathema against any attempt to meddle with slavery in the District of Columbia? when his leading political star is Thomas Jefferson? Is the Intelligencer serious, when it says that the game V. B. is playing was "intended" and "must result in the triumph of the Fanatics?" The man who makes such reckless declarations, is the slave of prejudice, or the lack of a faction.

The Whigs are terribly annoyed by Mr. Van Buren's Letter.—The Tel-graph pronounces it, "coming out as it does upon the eve of the elections in Virginia, as intended to influence the vote in that State." The letter is favorable of course, to the South!—The Norfolk Herald calls upon the "Southern people not to be deceived by this charmer, charm he never so wisely"—and admits "in truth, that Mr. Van Buren's opinions upon this subject, as set forth in his letter to his N. C. friends," (enemies, the Herald should have said,) "and reiterated to those of Virginia, are such, as any Southern man might entertain without fear or scruple—and yet (as the Herald) he would not give a fig for them; because we can have no confidence in their sincerity."—Indeed! what a suspicious sceptic this man is! Will not be believe the most solemn declarations that man ever made! What must he think too of Mr. V. B.'s understanding! To violate such pledges, would prove him out only to be the basest rascal, but the most consummate fool in the world.—Rich. Enq.

What a pretty Kettle of Fish.

The Washington Sun, (lucra non lucendo, Judge White's paper) contains the following extract of a letter to the Editor, from "Richmond, March 4."

"You must, of course, have heard of the resignation of Mr. Tyler, before this reaches you. I wish you could have heard his paper read in the Assembly of this State, and seen the writhings and contortions of the party as the damning truths, contained therein, were poured into the ears of those recreant Virginians, who have voluntarily submitted themselves to the yoke of Van Buren, and given up the glory of the Ancient Dominion. The feeling evinced by them, was worse than any thing they can expect to receive as a punishment in the certain hell that is to come. On the other hand, you would have been delighted with the high and noble bearing of the patriotic minority, who have battled inch by inch, and word by word, with the cravens who have sold their independence for the hope of office. It would have done your soul good to admire their situation—it was worth a pilgrimage to the ends of the earth to bear testimony to their triumph even in seeming defeat. Stanard Brown Summers, Gilmer, Dorinan, Witcher, Gregory, and a host of others, the friends of White, the protectors of the rights of the State, have almost received their reward when that noble, calm, and decided paper of Tyler's containing his resignation, was read. It is the death-knell to Van Burenism in this State. It is hoped here that nothing will prevent Mr. Leigh from retiring for a short time from the station he fills with so much honor to himself, and benefit to his constituents."

Ah! but Leigh has not yet retired even for a short time—and how he has turned the tables upon his friend! What a beautiful parody on the above precious morceau might be written on the scene of reading of Leigh's letter. Never was a party more discomfited and cowed. All the "writhings and contortions" were on the other side of the House—all the "high and noble bearing" gone! It "would have done your soul good to admire their situation!" Could the same pencil which drew the above Fancy Sketch, have only portrayed the scene of Saturday last in all its reality, what a gallery of woe—beggone and chap-fallen countenances, would grace his canvass! The candid Whigs admit themselves that their own "death-knell is rung."—Richmond Enquirer

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Domestic.

From the Savannah Georgian.

Order of Gen. Gaines.—We are indebted to Major Mountain, of the Army, for a copy of the Order of Gen. Gaines on sending to Gen. Clinch the command of the gallant corps who marched from New Orleans via Tampa to the relief of Clinch. It is a production which does honor to the heart of the veteran soldier!

HEAD QUARTERS, WESTERN DEPARTMENT, Fort Izard, on the Mississippi, Florida, March 3, 1836.

ORDER NO. 7.

I.—Called to East Florida by the savage massacres and conflagrations on the 28th December, and the following month, the Commanding General hastily collected, in Louisiana, the forces which accompanied him through that patriotic State. These troops, in the short space of thirty-six days, have marched by land and water nearly eight hundred miles—one hundred and forty through the country occupied by the enemy, whose principal force they have met, beaten, and forced to seek for peace.

II.—These important objects of the campaign having been accomplished with the hearty and cordial co-operation of Brig. Gen. Clinch, (to whose sound judgment the defence of the frontier had been wisely confided, and by whose gallantry the enemy had been chastised, on the 31st December, and since held in check as far as his limited means would allow) the troops of Louisiana are placed under his command in order to guard against the known faithlessness of the enemy until the arrival of the force under the officer charged with the diplomatic arrangements of the War Department. Whenever and as soon as that officer shall mature his plan of operations and accomplish the duties assigned him, the forces from Louisiana will return to New Orleans.

III.—The commanding General cannot consistently with his views of propriety, take leave of the troops by whom he has been so manfully sustained, without tendering to their grateful acknowledgments for the constancy and courage with which they have performed every duty, and borne privations, the recital of which would not fail to command the admiration of the virtuous and wise of every section of the Republic. The officers and soldiers of the whole of these forces, (including the Artillery from Tampa Bay, acting as a Light Brigade under command of Lt. Col. Twigg of the 4th Infantry,) have performed their duty so much to the satisfaction of the General, that he cannot discriminate between the relative claims of corps, of officers or other individuals, without the risk of invidious distinctions—all did their duty cheerfully and gallantly, and when it became necessary to meet the question, whether to eat the meat of their own horses, or to abstain an important position, all cheerfully preferred this unpleasant subsistence to any movement that would endanger the frontier. The horse meat was accordingly eaten by officers and men until the enemy was beaten and sued for peace. A timely supply of provisions arrived, escorted by the brave Georgians, Floridians, and Regulars, under General Clinch, at the moment the pacific proposition of the enemy were in the act of being answered. The Indians were fired upon by the General's light troops before he could be notified of the object of their being near the camp: they have since disappeared.

IV.—The General deeply regrets the fall of 1st Lieut. J. F. Izard, of the Dragons, acting Brigadier Major, and in command of the advance guard. He fell at the head of his corps, and though mortally wounded, had the heroic presence of mind to order, "Keep your positions, men, and be close." 2d Lieut. Duncan, 2d Artillery, was slightly wounded, Capt. Sanders commanding the friendly Indians, was severely wounded. Capt. Armstrong of the United States transport schooner *Neto*, was slightly wounded. The two last named officers were in the advance, where their services had been highly useful during the march. This officer and twenty-nine N. C. officers and soldiers of other companies of the Regiment, evinced their gallantry by their good conduct as well as by their honorable wounds. The General is convinced that he never commanded a more brave and efficient corps: he would do honor to any service.

The officers of the Medical Department merit the approbation of the General, for the attentive and skilful manner in which their duties were discharged.

List of killed and wounded.

Killed—1st Lieut. J. F. Izard, Dragons; Sergt. F. Dunn, 2d Artillery; Privates, F. Boie, V. Beck, H. Butler, of Louisiana Volunteers—Total, 5.

Wounded—Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Privates; 2d Artillery, 2; 4th Infantry, 2; Louisiana Volunteers, 30—Total wounded, 35.

By command of Major General Gaines. GEO. A. McALL, A. D. C. Acty. Am. Adj. Genl.

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A letter from an officer, under Gen. Clinch, dated Fort Drane, 13th March, gives a detail of the occurrences which took place with Gen. Gaines's army. In speaking of the success given him by Gen. Clinch, he says:

"Gen. Clinch procured all the transportation he could possibly get, and with 60 head of beef cattle, took up the line of march on the 5th. We reached General Gaines's camp the next day, about 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and of all the sufferings that have, or will be borne during this war, that of the forces under Gen. G. was the most severe. They were living on horse flesh which was starved to death, and the dogs in the camp; one dog's leg sold for \$5. Not a particle of bread had been seen for many days, and the Indians kept up a regular fire, night and day, for eight days, on the entrenchment.—After giving the troops all the supplies we carried down, Gen. G. turned over the command to Gen. C., who put the whole in line of march for this place on the 10th, and we arrived on the 11th, pretty well fatigued. It is truly fortunate that Gen. Clinch had it in his power to relieve Gaines, otherwise his whole army must have been cut off, as disease had begun to make its appearance in his camp, and he had no possible means of carrying off his wounded men. Lieutenant Izard was the only officer killed, but several others were wounded, and about 30 men, principally of the Louisiana Volunteers under General Smith. The Indians are on the same river, but a little back from Gaines's camp, in an impenetrable swamp of Cypress, which has many islands in it. The Indians say they are willing to quit fighting, but they will not leave the country—they will die first."

Chas. Cour.

The PARDONING POWER.—We are directed to state, for the information of all concerned, that the Governor will not even consider an application for Mercy, unless it be accompanied by an official statement of the case, by the presiding Judge. To act upon loose unauthenticated statements, would amount to a general gaoi delivery, and it would be as well to repeal the penal code at once.

Columbia Times.